

New York Gets Some Culture

BY SUSAN PIPERATO

T

he year 1987, already the year the stock market crashed, will also be remembered as one of unprecedented cultural crisis in New York.

Last April, Bess Myerson resigned as Commissioner of Cultural Affairs after it was alleged that she had influenced a judge presiding over her lover's divorce. Media coverage was constant, with newspaper headlines making reference to the scandal daily. Without a commissioner for most of the year, the Department of Cultural Affairs was greatly weakened.

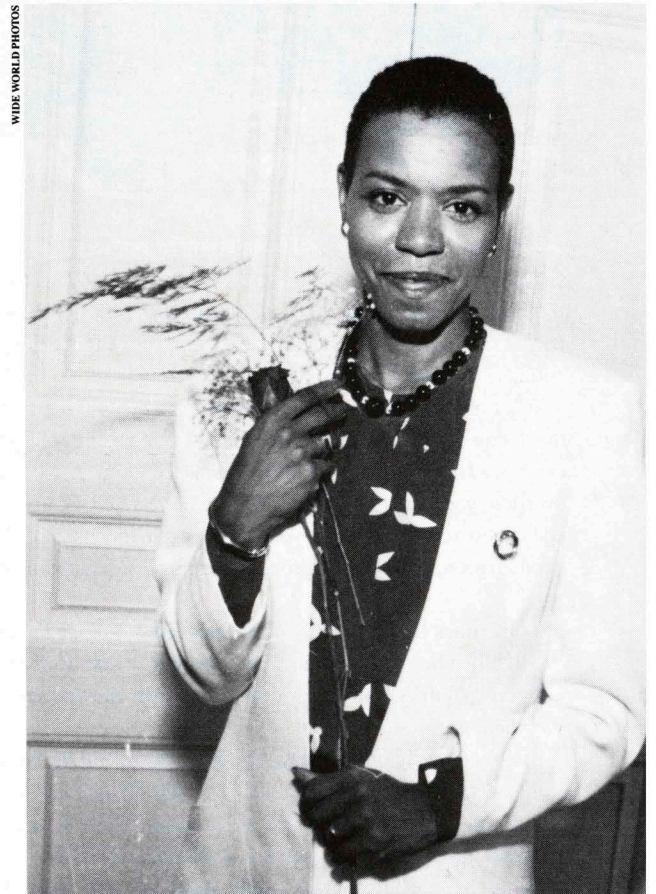
The stock market crash was a final blow. Mayor Koch ordered a hiring freeze and proposed a four-percent budget cut for Cultural Affairs in 1989. Arts patrons and city officials alike were left wondering: What kind of administrator could pull the department together, lead it through a period of economic emergency, and work to promote and protect New York artists?

Enter **Mary Schmidt Campbell**, commissioner since October. She's not Superwoman, but as far as cultural advocates are concerned, she'll do nicely.

Campbell, previously executive director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, is the first professional arts administrator ever to direct the Department of Cultural Affairs. Already she has won praise from the arts community, local media, and city officials alike for her grassroots approach to revitalizing New York's cultural community.

The job she has been given is formidable. The Commissioner of Cultural Affairs handles an annual budget of \$133 million—the second largest arts fund in the nation, distributed to 32 institutions in the five boroughs, ranging from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Bronx Zoo to various community arts groups.

The commissioner also presents the needs of artists to city administrators. Campbell is supportive of the individual artists and the small groups that eventually grow into major commercial attractions. But as the appointee of a mayor whose real estate policies make it difficult for artists to survive, Campbell is guaranteed a challenging tenure.



MARY SCHMIDT CAMPBELL

SUSAN PIPERATO, a 1981 SU graduate in English and magazine journalism, is a former features editor of *Popular Photography* magazine. She recently relocated to Australia.

"The underlying question of my tenure is, How do you use public funds to make sure the city is culturally attractive and affordable?" Campbell says. "I can't be laid back. I have to step forward and speak up. . . .

"I think it takes an awful lot of skill to do this. We are now facing fiscal crisis; we have one sector for, one against real estate development, and I have to learn to become skillful with many different factions."

Campbell's goals include better accommodations for artists, financial stability for arts groups, and promotion of the city's cultural life within and outside New York. She knows that if the economic situation doesn't improve there will be drastic changes in her plans. But she insists that, whatever the outcome, cultural services must be recognized as "absolutely essential to the life of this city, not a luxury."

As Campbell sees it, culture is as vital to New York as "sanitation, the fire department, the police force, and public transportation. . . .

"There's much that is exciting and rewarding in creating cultural policy," she says. "I'm not afraid to communicate the issues of the arts community to other parts of the city, from the government and the citizens of New York right up to the mayor."

After starting out as an English major at Skidmore College, Campbell's career took an unexpected turn when she enrolled in a course in modern painting and sculpture during her junior year in 1967. "I was suddenly and completely enamored of visual artists," she says, and she decided "then and there to go to graduate school to study art history.

"I became absolutely overwhelmed and excited by modernism," Campbell recalls. After teaching English and traveling in Africa for a few years, Campbell "came back fired up" and enrolled in the art history graduate program at SU, where her husband was earning a Ph.D. in physics. She planned to specialize in modern art, but found she had "stumbled into a real gold mine" when she chose the black American painter Rodmere Bearden for her thesis topic. "It gave me a chance to stake my claim within the field of African-American fine arts," she says.

For her thesis project, she curated a show of Bearden's work at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, and later was asked to join the museum's staff. Museum work seemed a lively way to deal with art history; while the academic issues remained important, the public's response was also involved. This appealed to Campbell. "I was fascinated by the dialogue that takes place whenever an object is placed out in public view."

She joined the Studio Museum in 1977 and learned to turn her creative talents toward administration. "A really fine administrator is actually a very creative, inventive person who is constantly working to expand the boundries and creatively interpret the rules," she says.

Campbell transformed a fledgling organization housed in an unheated loft above a liquor store into a large, professionally staffed, nationally acclaimed black fine arts museum.

The biggest problem for New York artists, says Campbell, is that the city is difficult to afford. "There are still many places that artists can go to live and work," she explains, "but it seems that every time they move into a new area, developers follow, values appreciate, and the artists end up getting kicked out."

Campbell finds it ironic that the private sector should benefit from artists, who "have the foresight and vision to make neighborhoods come alive," while the volatility of the real estate market makes the city seem hostile to artists. "We need to reward artists, not punish them for going as an advance guard into neighborhoods that were formerly thought of as fallow," she says.

Campbell is researching several means of offering artists affordable housing, including limited equity co-ops, identifying private capital to

As the new Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, Mary Schmidt Campbell encounters deep budget cuts and the residue of her predecessor's headline-grabbing scandal.

subsidize housing, and holding city property that comes up for auction to develop into artists quarters. She also points out that the city's struggling artists need financial funding as well as living accommodations.

Campbell believes that the key to success is in the solvency of individual arts agencies around town. By encouraging arts organizations to adopt a more businesslike approach, she hopes to bolster private-sector support throughout the arts hierarchy. "It's extremely important for arts organizations to be as stable as possible. . . . I want to see larger numbers of arts institutions past the desperation stage of fighting to survive from season to season," says Campbell.

Integral to Campbell's plan is her adoption of the arts stabilization plan of the National Arts Stabilization Fund (NASF). NASF works to strengthen the management of arts organizations by emphasizing long-



DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM'S BUGAKU

term financial health and stability.

When arts organizations are better managed, Campbell believes, then they will become more visible and more marketable. At present, only the greatest commercial successes reach the general public, and smaller institutions remain obscure. Campbell's campaign to "get the cultural community out in the open" depends on fiscally sound organizations, free-ticket programs, and better publicity.

"Having been on the other side, I know you have to work so hard just to put a production on, or hang a painting on a wall, that your ability to step back and sell that production or that painting to an audience is lost." Accordingly, the city's great cultural diversity is lost to the broader public.

"I'd like to see a cultural menu for *all* of New York City more vigorously promoted," she says. "That's my ultimate goal. When people come to visit New York, their impression will be, 'Now this is a cultural town.' "

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC

The field of art criticism is in good hands, thanks to two alumni with very different views.

Hilton Kramer '50 was chief critic of *The New York Times* before becoming co-founder and editor of *The New Criterion*. He is one of the most authoritative figures in the New York art world today.

While a drama critic can "close

a show with a bad review," an art critic's impact is less immediate, Kramer says. "The art critic can write a negative review in perfect confidence that the show isn't going to close one day sooner because of it. That's a great advantage because the critic is able to write in a more disinterested way, knowing the fate of the event doesn't hang on his every word."

Kramer says his principal focus as an art critic has been a distinction between the purely aesthetic factors in a work and its subsidiary artistic considerations. "The most important thing for me is the aesthetic quality of the object."

Clement Greenberg '30 takes a different tack. Greenberg spent many years as associate editor of *Commentary* and currently free lances. He is working on a book on what he calls his "home-made

aesthetics."

Says Greenberg, "My main responsibility as an art critic is to point to what I like and what I don't like, even if the art doesn't represent my personal favorite. Even though I prefer representational art, through the years I've been identified with abstract expressionism just because I happened to be around when the best visual art was abstract. So I've just said what I liked and given my reasons."—CNS

MARY ELLEN MENGUCCI



YOUNG AT ART

Artist **Betty Blayton Taylor '59** is head ringmaster of the Children's Art Carnival, a community-based program bringing art to the children of New York City.

Originally sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art for underprivileged youth, the Children's Art Carnival is now an independent, non-profit organization located in Harlem. With Taylor serving as executive director, the program provides roughly 12,000 youngsters each year with an array of in-school and after-school creative learning experiences.

More than 30 professional artists teach courses in painting, drawing, pottery, dance, film/video, printmaking, and other art forms. They teach in the program's brownstone, and they visit more than 50 schools and community centers in New York each year.

The program, cited as an alternative-education model by the National Endowment for the Arts, is funded by government and private sources. The suggested tuition for students, says Taylor, is \$1 per session; several students receive scholarships to attend.

"What really makes me happy," says Taylor, "is when I see us getting through to those kids who are really interested in the arts. To see them consistently coming to class and to see things humming around here is wonderful. It's really something when a youngster who comes in at age nine returns at 21 with their lives all together." —MEM

CLASSIC WAVES

Radio station WQXR AM/FM doesn't have the most listeners in New York, but it has the best, according to president and general manager **Warren Bodow '60**.

More than 50 years ago, WQXR became the nation's first classical-music station. It now attracts 700,000 listeners a week—far more than any other classical station—and among them are the most educated and influential of New Yorkers, says Bodow, a WQXR manager for nearly a decade.

This spring, WQXR, which is owned by the New York Times Company, will move from the Times Building to a state-of-the-art facility on lower Fifth Avenue. It includes 18,000 feet of space and a new studio "considered to be the best in the business."

One thing that won't change, though, is the music. The best part of Bodow's job, he says, "is coming in each morning and knowing you're working to promote music that has lasted for centuries."

—MEM

DEALER'S ART

Art dealer **Frances Iger Laterman '59** is self-employed, and that's a luxury. She rarely represents more than 12 artists at once, and never an artist whose work she doesn't respect.

"If I don't love it," she says, "I'm not interested."

"I don't have to go with a popular trend or a popular artist," she adds, "because I don't have that incredible overhead of a gallery. . . . I go with people that I think have very, very special talent."

They include Nissan Engle, Pierre-Marie Brisson, and Jean Louis Esplit. —MEM



SET OF PIPES

Professional organists are not a rare breed, but **Leonard Raver G'52** is the one and only official organist of the New York Philharmonic.

He's also a member of the organ faculty at the Juilliard School and he travels regularly for recitals. This spring, he will embark upon a European tour, with a performance at the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur in Paris and other concerts in France, Holland, and Germany.

Raver, who has performed on most of the world's finest organs, says an organist's biggest challenge "is that we're always playing on someone else's instrument." He practices 15-20 hours before his first concert on an organ.

—MEM



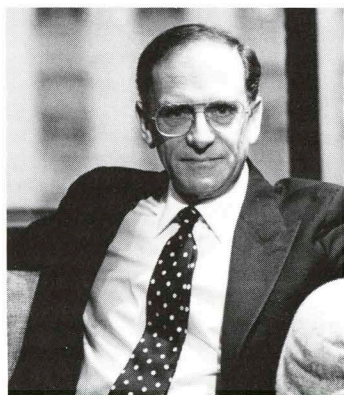
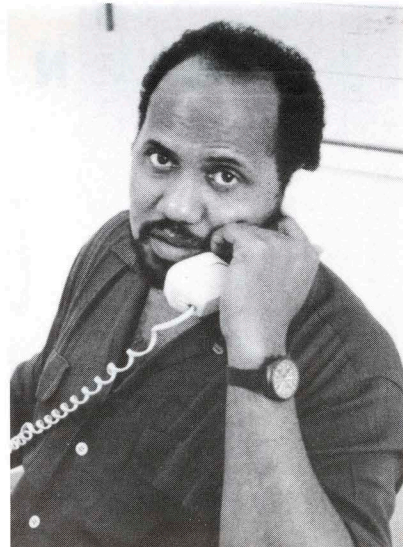
On His Own

February was a good month for **St. Clair Bourne '67**. The Whitney ran a retrospective of 12 of his films, and his piece on Langston Hughes was part of *Voices & Visions*, PBS's landmark series on American poets.

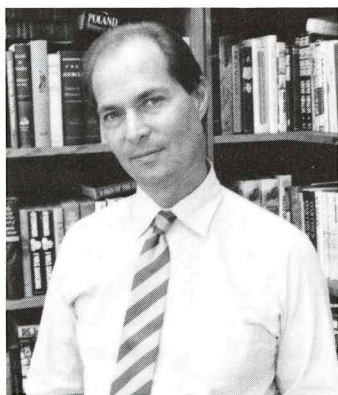
Bourne is one of the country's most diverse and prolific independent filmmakers, with 31 films to his credit. He's contributed documentaries to PBS' *Black Journal* series, and his recent *The Black and the Green* depicts black activists visiting their counterparts in Northern Ireland. He doesn't always concentrate on black subjects, but does bring a black perspective to his films.

He tries not to let funding interfere with his intentions. "I originally became an independent because I couldn't find anyone to pay me to make the films I wanted to make," he says. "I've been raising my own money ever since.

"Over the last 20 years, I've learned that good intentions and a clear vision are not enough. You also must be an entrepreneur without letting business considerations affect the sensitivity of the editorial statement. That's difficult, and it's a battle fought by white independent filmmakers as well as black."—CNS



JANKLOW



LASTER

THE BOOKMAKERS

Reading is fundamental to **Mort Janklow '50** and **Owen Laster '60**, perhaps the two most prominent literary agents in New York.

Janklow, a corporate attorney by training, began his literary career "more or less accidentally" in 1974, when he helped friend **William Safire '50** settle a contract squabble over his first novel.

It was a turning point. The three highest prices ever paid for book rights have been negotiated out of Janklow's office. Now he spends his time negotiating deals for such mega-selling authors as Sidney Sheldon, Danielle Steele, and Judith Krantz.

But there are plenty of big-name writers to go around. Laster, head of the William Morris Agency's literary department, lists James Michener, Robert Penn Warren, and Gore Vidal among the 100 or so he represents.

So what's Laster do in his spare time? "Reading," he says, "although when you do something for a living you do it differently than when you did it for pleasure. . . . You almost can't help thinking 'Would this make a movie?,' 'Is this going to sell abroad?'" —RGL

GLITERATI

His best-selling first novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*, in 1984, and its film adaptation have forever identified novelist **Jay McInerney G'86** as a hip New York insider.

In fact, McInerney splits his time between Manhattan and Ann Arbor, Michigan, where his wife, Merry Reymond '81, is completing a doctorate. Although he writes in both places, it is images of New York that often provide inspiration for his work.

"Every writer has his own personal landscape," McInerney says. "For Raymond Carver it's the Pacific Northwest; for Hemingway it's Michigan and Europe as the American expatriate. New York just seems to be a terrain my imagination responds to."

McInerney fans will get another taste of the Big Apple in his third novel, a story of struggling actresses, due out in September.

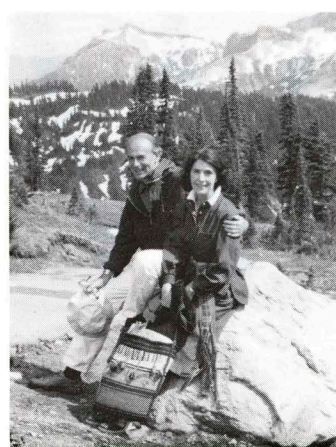
—RGL

JOINT EXHIBITION

Iknew I'd have to marry someone who would go to all those museums with me," says painter and sculptor **Luise Meyers Kaish '46, G '51**.

Not only did she find that companion, but 40 years later she and **Morton Kaish '49**, also a painter, can view one another's work in some of the best galleries. Between them, Luise and Morton are represented in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney, and the Jewish Museum, among others.

Both also teach—Morton at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Luise at Columbia. "Making art remains the constant consuming pursuit and it's a solitary pursuit," says Morton. "Any change, then, brings one back to the world. Teaching does it in ways that renew the spirit



instead of depleting it."

The Kaishes have worked throughout Europe and Israel but New York remains their home. "It's the art center of the world," says Luise. "What more could one want?" —RGL

PORTRAIT OF A PAINTER

This year, the chairman of U.S. Steel was just one of the business leaders who insisted **ALBERT K. MURRAY '30** paint his portrait. As a portraitist, Murray is world famous.

During World War II, Murray was one of only six Navy combat artists. He has since painted many prominent defense officers and world figures in banking, business, law, education, and public life: Gloria Vanderbilt, four generations of the Shriner family of Boston, Sir Walter Essex, even SU Chancellor William P. Graham.

He's broadened his range of subjects through the years. There was a time when he turned down prominent subjects (even presidents) "because I didn't like what they were doing," Murray says. "I used to think that if I painted them, I was supporting them.

"Now I realize that's not true; painting them doesn't mean you subscribe to their policies. Today if I had the opportunity to paint some of the world's great dictators—men whose theories I completely despise—I would jump at the chance."

Maintaining mood in a painting is a challenge, Murray says. "If I'm doing a banker who's come up from Wall Street on a bad day, he's not going to look as though he's just had a presidential appointment," Murray says. "In that case, I'd be advised to work on his suit and leave his facial expression alone." —CNS